

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 OPR-02 SY-05 OC-05 CCO-00

CAB-02 COME-00 DOTE-00 EB-07 FAA-00 FEAE-00 OES-03

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7738

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMEMBASSY THERAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NY

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK

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DIA WASHDC

CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 15297

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: SO FAR SO GOOD

REF: BEIRUT 15242 (1605Z)

SUMMARY GENERAL SECURITY CONDITIONS IN BEIRUT CONTINUE TO IMPROVE, ALTHOUGH HEAVY CLASHES TOOK PLACE OVERNIGHT IN THE BAABDA AREA FOLLOWING CHRISTIAN MOP UP OF MUSLIM VILLAGE DEC 16. NORTHERN CITY OF TRIPOLI ALSO REMAINED TROUBLED. DESPITE MAJOR INCIDENT OUTSIDE CAPITAL AND APPARENTLY SYMBOLIC WITHDRAWAL OF LEFTIST REPS FROM HIGHER COORDINATION COMMITTEE, CEASEFIRE FOLLOW UP IS TILL ON THE RECKS AND THERE ARE SIGNS THAT AT LEAST SOME ENERGY IS NOW BEING DIVERTED TO REJUVENATION OF POLITICAL PROCESSES. WE CONTINUE TO RECEIVE INDICATIONS, AS CITY RESIDENTS RESUME NORMAL ACTIVITIES VERY CHARILY, THAT SYRIA IS PRESSING FOR ENLARGEMENT OF CABINET SOONEST AND ONE SOURCE, WHI IS IN GOOD POSITION TO KNOW, SUGGEST KHADDAM IS EXPECTED HERE DEC 17 OR 18 END SUMMARY.

1. GENRAL SECURITY PICTURE HAS CONTINUED TO IMPROVE DESPITE INCIDENT AT SEBNAY (ADJACENT TO BAABDA) DEC 16 WHICH HAS RAISED TENSION BETWEEN HITHERTO CO-EXISTING MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS IN THAT REGION. FORCE OF SOME 200 CHRISTIANS MILITIAMEN, SPEARHEADED BY CHAMOUNIST FORCES MOVED INTO MUSLIM VILLAGE YESTERDAY IN RESPONSE TO ALLEGED UPSURGE IN SNIPING AT BAABDA AND NEARBY HADATH (CHRISTIAN), ARRESTING MEN, CLLECTING ARMS, AND WREAKING CONSIDERABLE HAVOC, INCLUDING DESTRUCTION OF MOSQUE MINARET WHICH ATTACKERS CLAIMED SERVED AS OP/SIGNAL PLATFORM. LEBANESE ARMY AND SECURITY FORCES WERE CALLED IN AND WE UNDERSTAND ALL KIDNAP VICTIMS WERE RELEASED. INCIDENT, WHICH, INVOLVED MUSLIMS AFFILIATED WITH KAMAL JUMBLATT'S PSP, RESULTED IN HEAVY LOCALIZED EXCHANGES OF FIRE OVERNIGHT AND HAD REPRCUS- SIONS IN HIGHER COORDINATION COMMITTEE (SEE BELOW). ELSEWHERE CONFIDENTIAL

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IN CITY, EXCHANGES AND SNIPING WERE REPORTED BETWEEN SHIYAH AND AIN RUMANNEH AND SIM AL FIL/DEKWANNEH NABAA. BOTH BEIRUT RADIO AND DEC 17 PRESS REPORT CLAMEST NIGHT IN TEN DAYS. BUT RADIO MORNING DEC 17 HAS NOT RPT NOT DECLARED ANY STREETS OF CAPITAL TO BE SAFE.

2. PULLBACK IN HOTEL DISTRICT CONTINUES TO BE EFFECTIVE AND, WITH FALL OF DARKNESS, ONCE GAY PHOENICIA STREET NEIGHBORHOOD

ASSUMES EERIE CHARACTER OF UNDISCOVERED TOMB. WE UNDERSTAND FROM SEVERAL REIABLE SOURCES THAT GUNMEN WHO GAVE UP THEIR ACCOMMODATIONS IN BEIRUT'S "LUXURY" HOTELS, LURK NEARBY (LEFTIST ARE APPARENTLY STILL EXCELSIOR PALM BEACH HOTELS). FOR MAD DASH BACK INTO PLACE AT FIRST HINT OF CEASEFIR BREAKDOWN.

3. ZAHLE IS REPORTEDLY IN SECOND DAY OF RELATIVE QUIET WITH ONLY DESULTORY EXCHANGES NOTED. OVERNIGHT FIRING IN TRIPOLI WAS LESS INTENSE THAN DURING LAST FEW DAYS, BUT THUGS OF FAROUK MUQADDAM'S "24TH OCTOBER MOVEMENT" HAVE APPARENTLY SEIZED VESSEL OF UNDISCLOSED NATIONALITY IN TRIPOLI HARBOR. FROM RATHER CONFUSED REPORTING, IT APPEARS THEY ARE THREATENING TO BLOW SHIP UP UNLESS THEIR DEMANDS RE PAYMENT OF SALARIES TO WORKERS AT LOCAL CHEMICAL PLANT (OWNED, WE UNDERSTAND BY DOUMIT FAMILY) ARE MET. IN DEC 16 ACTION NEAR TRIPOLI, A NUMBER OF GOL ARMORED VEHICLES (UP TO 11 BY ONE ACCOUNT) WITH DRIVERS WERE SEIZED BY TRIPOLITIANIANS. THERE IS NOT RPT NO FURTHER WORD RE THREE WEST GERMANS REPORTEDLY ABDUCTED IN THE AKKAR DEC 15.

4. POLITICOS ARE SEEKING TO INSTILL SENSE OF MOMENTUM IN POLITICAL PROCESSES WHILE CASTING WARY GLANCES OVER THEIR SHOULDERS AT SECURITY SITUATION, CABINET, WHICH WILL MEET DEC 17, IN REGULAR SESSION, WILL UNQUESTIONABLY DEVOTE ITS MAJOR EFFORTS TO STRENGTHENING SECURITY SITUATION, BUT OUR PRIVATE CONTACTS CONTINUE TO REPORT BEHIND THE SCENE CONTACTS LOOKING TOWARD AN ENLARGEMENT OF THE CABINET. PROBABLY THE BEST GUARANTEE (IF SUCH IS POSSIBLE IN TODAY'S LEBANON) THAT THESE EFFORTS WILL NOT FALL BY THE WAYSIDE IS THE APPARENT PRESSURE SYRIA IS MAINTAINING ON ALL SIDES IN SUPPORT OF PRIMIN KARAME'S ATTEMPTS TO BRING SOME SEMBLANCE OF ORDER OUT OF CURRENT NATIONAL CHAOS. CONFIDENTIAL

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WE HAVE BEEN TOLD BY MUKHLES TANNOUS, PRIVATE FONMIN KHADDAM MAY ARRIVE IN BEIRUT DEC 17 OR 18 AND THAT LEBANESE ARMY HAS HELICOPTER STANDING BY TO TRANSPORT HIM ON SHORT NOTICE FROM SYRIAN BORDER TO BAABDA. WE ARE PRESENTLY UNABLE TO CONFIRM THIS INFORMATION BUT, AS NOTED IN RECENT REPORTING, IT IS WIDELY EXPECTED THAT KHADDAM WILL SOON MAKE AN APPEARANCE HERE.

5. GREATEST DANGER OF THE MOMENT IS THAT PRECARIOUS TRUCE WILL BREAK DOWN BEFORE IT CAN BE REINFORCED WITH MEASURABLE POLITICAL PROGRESS. SEBNAY INCIDENT YESTERDAY APPARENTLY PROMPTED LEFTIST TO STAGE WALKOUT AT HIGHTER COORDINATION COMMITTEE, BUT THEY CAREFULLY LEFT WAY OPEN FOR A RETURN TO ITS DELIBERATIONS AND THEY ARE EXPECTED TO BE IN THEIR SEATS WHEN THE COMMITTEE RESUMES DISCUSSIONS AT 1100 LOCAL DEC 17. SUGGESTING THAT THEY ARE INCLINED TO GO ALONG WITH THE CURRENT

LULL, AT LEAST PROVISIONALLY. EVENTS AT SEDNAY ALSO FORCED POSTPONEMENT UNTIL TODAY OF REPORTED CHANOUN 'ARAFAT MEETING. CHAMOUN'S SECRETARYN EMILE MUGHABGHAB, HAS INDICATED PRIVATELY TTHAT PRIMIN KARAME MAY JOIN THE SESSION, WHICH IS INTENDED TO FOCUS ON JOINT EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN THE CEASEFIRE AND REVIVE THE GOL-PLO LIAISON COMMITTEE AND FOCUS UPON THE MANAGEMENT OF POST CRISIS RELATIONS BETWEEN THE GOL AND THE FEDAYEEN.

6. MORIBUND PARLIAMENT HAS ALSO GOTTEN INTO THE ACT NOW THAT THE SHOOTING HAS DIED DOWN. PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE WHICH HAS BEEN HOLDING MEETINGS AT BETTER REMAINING HOTELS WILL APPARENTLY ISSUE REPORT OF ITS RECOMMENDATIONS IN NEAR FUTURE. ACCORDING TO UNCONFIRMED SOURCE, REPORT WILL COM-
PRISE FOLLOWING GIVE POINTS:

- (A) EQUAL MUSLIM/CHRISTIAN REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT,
- (B) GUARANTEE OF PRESIDENCY TO CHRISTIANS,
- (C) ABOLITION OF ARTICLE 95 (CONFESSIONALISM IN CIVIL SERVICE) OF CONSTITUTION,
- (D) A NEW NATIONALITY LAW,
- (E) DEFINITION AND LIMITATION OF POWERS OF PRESIDENT AND PRIMER MINISTER.

EVEN IF THIS COMES TO PASS, HOWEVER, IT IS PROBLEMATIC WHETHER OR NOT FULL PARLIAMENT WILL BE ABLE TO PULL UP ITS SOCKS AND GIVE SUBSTANCE TO ITS RECOMMENDATIONS.

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7. COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY HAS PICKED UP SLIGHTLY IN RESPONSE TO THE QUIETER CIVIL SITUATION AS MORE SHOPS IN NEIGHBOTHOOD AREAS OPEN. HOWEVER, THE CENTRAL BUSINESS AREA IS QUIET AS IS THE PHOENICIA HOLIDAY INN HOTEL DISTRICT. MOST OFFICES REMAIN CLOSED OR ONLY LIGHTLY STAFFED AS EMPLOYEES CONTINUE TO BE WARY OF THE RISKS OF MOVING TO AND FROM PLACES OF EMPLOYMENT.

8. THE PROSPECT OF BANKS REOPENING SOON IS DIM. THE BANKERS' ASSOCIATION, WHICH HAD BEEN RELUCTANT TO REOPEN BEFORE THE LATEST OUTBREAK OF FIGHTING, IS NOW EXPECTED TO EXHIBIT EVEN LESS READINESS TO RESUME NORMAL OPERATIONS UNTIL A DISTINCT PERIOD OF CALM HAS PASSED. THE SAME ATTITUDE IS HELD BY MERCHANTS, INDUSTRIALISTS, AND SOME LABOR LEADERS WHO LACK CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVT'S ABILITY TO ASSURE BASIC SECURITY.

9 SUPPLIES OF FOODSTUFFS AND OTHER SUPPLIES REMAIN ADEQUATE BUT SOME TEMPORARY SHORTAGES ARE BEING FELT BECAUSE OF DIFFICULTIES IN MAKING DISTRIBUTION. THE GOVT HAS ANNOUNCED THAT ADEQUATE FLOUR HAS BEEN SUPPLIED TO BAKERIES BUT HEATING OIL, GASOLINE, AND BUTANE GAS FOR COOKING ARE GENRALLY UNAVAILABLE UNTIL RETAIL DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS ARE FULLY RESTORED WHICH IS EXPECTED TO TAKE ABOUT A WEEK. THE PETROLEUM UNDERWATER LINE

AT DORA (NORTH BEIRUT) IS SXHEDULED TO BE REPAIRED TODAY,
SECURITY CONDITIONS PERMITTING, WITH A TANKER LOAD OF HEATING
OIL TO BE UNLOADED ON THIRSDAY. A TANKER CARRYING GASOLINE
FROM TRIPOLI IS EXPECTED SUNDAY OR MONDAY.

10 THE AIRPORT CONTINUES TO OPERATE ADEQUATELY WITH ONLY
PANAM AND LUFTHANSA AMONG MAJOR AIRLINES HAVING COM-
PLETELY CUT SERVICE TO BEIRUT. THE PORT IS STILL QUIET.
GODLEY

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